DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 821 FL 017 624

AUTHOR Bickes, Gerhard
TITLE On the Role of Adjectives in the Language Acquisition of Adult Immigrants in Germany.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the World Conference of Applied Linguistics (8th, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, August 16-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjectives; Adults; Case Studies; Foreign Countries; *German; Immigrants; Migrant Workers; *Pragmatics; Second Language Learning; *Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS *West Germany

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the distribution and specific use of adjectives and related expressions in the naturally acquired German of one Turkish and two Italian migrant workers in West Germany. The research was part of a larger study of untutored language acquisition by migrant workers in Europe. Specifically, this study examined the learning of vocabulary for ascribing properties to objects, comparisons, grading of qualifications, and expressions of evaluation in the course of 2.5 years. In general, a low adjective frequency was found in these subjects despite the fact that as adults they had a fully developed system of perceptual and cognitive patterns for structuring and conceptualizing linguistic input. Explanations for this phenomenon are sought in pragmatics (i.e., the learner's uncertainty about the appropriateness of usage) and the organization of concepts. The subjects also showed an analytical (i.e., lexical) approach to comparison, attempting to specify the degree to which an object shows a particular property. The semantic, logical, and pragmatic status of adjectives are examined for insight into both low frequency and idiosyncratic use in these learners' language. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED299821

The University of Western Australia

Dr. Gerhard Bickes, Lecturer
Department of German
Nedlands, Western Australia 6009
Telegrams Uniwest Perth, Telex AA92992
Telephone (09) 380

On the role of adjectives in the language acquisition of adult immigrants in Germany

Paper presented at the 8th World Congress of Applied Linguistics at the University of Sydney, August 1987.

by

Gerhard Bickes

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Bickes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 017624

Appendix: Tables A - F

A. Source and target languages

B. Size and distribution of major word classes during period of ca 8 months (Re-telling of silent movie)

	Ang.		Tin.		Ilh.	
	t_1	t_2	t_1	t_2	t_1	t_2
Items	27	33	28	47	35	68
% Nouns	40.7	45.5	28.6	23.4	34.3	23.5
% Pronouns	11.1	9.1	7.1	10.6	5.7	4.4
% Verbs	18.5	24.2	28.6	29.8	17.1	32.4
% Adject.	3.7	6.1	0	2.1	5.7	4.4
% Adverbs	0	0	17.6	12.8	14.3	19.1
% Prepos.	14.8	9.1	7.1	6.4	5.7	5.9

C. Growth of lexicon (Re-telling of silent movie)

	Growth				
	Items	Nouns	Verbs	Adject.	Adverbs
	%	%	%	%	%
Ang.	22.2	36.4	60	101	0
Tin.	67.8	37.5	75	100	22
Ilh.	94.2	33.3	268	50	117

D. Elicitation of adjectives (Tino)

Intended elicitations	*Actual elicitations*
fröhlich/glücklich/lustig/froh	lachen/Glück haben
mutig/tapfer	kämpfen/prima Mann/SL
höflich	gutes Kind/schöner Charakter
gemein/böse/brutal	böse/dumm/Idiot
aggressiv/zornig/wütend/erregt	böse/dumm/Idiot
frech	böse/dumm
lieb/freundlich/nett	gut/sympathisch
verzweifelt/entsetzt	SL
schockiert/fassungslos	SL
traurig	traurig (2nd exp.)

E. Antonymous and complementary adjectives (Picture comparison)

Tino: klein - groß
alt - neu/jung/modern
weg - da

Marc.: alt/kaputt - jung/neu
rechte - linke Seite
letzte - erste
auf - zu

Ayse: alt/kaputt - jung/neu
sauber - schmutzig
gut - schlecht/böse
klein - groß

F. Distribution of antithetic structures

Ratio of adjectives used **with** and **without** antithetic expressions

Tino 8 : 3

Marc. 10 : 5

Ayse 11 : 6

On the Role of Adjectives in the Untutored Language Acquisition of Adult Immigrants in Germany

1 The ESF project

The untutored language acquisition by migrant workers in Germany has received extensive attention in the past 10 years with 2 large projects carried out at the Universities of Heidelberg (HPD) and Wuppertal (ZISA). These projects focussed on the syntactic development of the so-called Pidgin German spoken by most of the Italian, Spanish and Portuguese workers living in West Germany. Being predominantly cross-sectional studies mainly using data drawn from interviews, the projects also took social and psychological aspects into account and aimed at the description and analysis of the varieties of German sequentially developed by adult speakers in their natural environment.

The following findings, concerning the distribution and specific use of adjectives and related expressions in the naturally acquired German of one Turkish and two Italian migrant workers, are based on data collected within the most recent research carried out in the area of untutored language acquisition by adult migrant workers. The project, involving 5 European countries and running over 6 years with a staff of about 30 researchers, is sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF) in Strasbourg. In the following I shall refer to it as the ESF project; for a full description see PERDUE (1982).

There are at least four aspects of this project which appear to go beyond previous related research. First the number of languages - both source and target - which are simultaneously studied; secondly the attempt to carry out a coordinated longitudinal study in these different language environments; thirdly the range and type of linguistic phenomena

whose acquisition is investigated; and finally the attempt to relate these multiple skills to each other and to various nonlinguistic factors which may determine their acquisition. The project is set up as a comparative study in France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden, with the corresponding target languages French, German, English, Dutch and Swedish. Six source languages are taken into account: Arabic, Finnish, Italian, Punjabi, Spanish and Turkish (see table **A** in the appendix).

Over a period of 2 1/2 years, data were collected from both initial learners and - in some countries - from long resident learners. A whole range of techniques was used, which may be roughly subdivided into two groups: weakly prestructured free conversation and stronger prestructured planned encounters with experimental elicitation of particular second language performances. Four broad topics of investigation have been chosen:

a. Understanding, misunderstanding, breakdown of communication
b. Thematic structure of utterances
c. Reference to person, space and time
d. Processes in the developing lexicon.

In this paper I want to concentrate on the last of these four areas by taking a closer look at that part of the learner's lexicon which deals with the ascription of properties to reference objects, the drawing of comparisons between such objects, the grading of qualifications and the expression of evaluations.

2. Word classes in the early lexicon

DIETRICH (1985) presents some results from an analysis of the developing lexicon of 3 subjects who took part in the ESF project.

DIETRICH relates his findings to some observations on child language development put forward by GENTNER (1982) who states a clear preponderance of nominal over verbal elements in the early language of children with radically different language backgrounds. Similar evidence for an uneven distribution of certain word classes is given in table **B** (see appendix), which presents the findings of DIETRICH's analysis of film re-tellings by one Turkish and two Italian adults, recorded at 2 different times during their early language acquisition (DIETRICH 1985, p.8). Although the figures in table **B** at first glance do not show any clear-cut pattern, some developments and tendencies can be observed. First, the overall number of lingustic items used has grown considerably during the 8 months between the 2 experiments; secondly, there is in the case of Angelina and Ilhami an initial preponderance of nouns over verbs, which remains strong during Angelina's lexical development, whilst becoming reversed in Ilhami's lexicon used at the second recording; thirdly, the percentage of adjectives and adverbs is small in comparison with that of nouns and verbs.

A much clearer developmental pattern is revealed when one turns to table **C**, in which the same data are analyzed according to their growth rate. It turns out that Angelina is the slowest learner, with an overall growth rate of 22.2%. The increase of Tino's repertoire amounts to 67.8%, and Ilhami is by far the fastest learner. The new words, however, are not equally distributed over the 4 categories considered. The nominal category seems to be independent of the general development and its expansion is steady and uniform for all 3 subjects. The development of the remaining three categories is completely different but nevertheless regular, following the general principle: the better the learner, the higher the increase in the non-nominal lexicon (see DIETRICH 1985, pp 10-11). In the case of Ilhami the particularly strong increase in adverbs is connected

with the growth of verbs, since the two word classes are obviously closely related.

However, in all three learners the number of adjectives remains remarkably small in comparison with the other grammatical categories. This phenomenon can be generally observed throughout the data collected from all participants in the German project. One may consider GENTNER's "Natural Partition Hypothesis" presented in the aforementioned article as a plausible explanation of the unbalanced distribution and frequency of nouns, verbs and adjectives in the adult learner's early lexicon. According to this hypothesis the dominance of nouns over verbs in the early language of children follows from the fact that

> "... the noun/verb division is originally based on a division in the perceptual world between objects on the one hand and relationships and other predicative notions on the other." (GENTNER 1982, p.327).

Since physical objects display the perception-based properties of saliency, stability and cohesiveness, they make it easier for the child to match this part of his knowledge with the linguistic input to which he is exposed. Therefore nouns are learned before verbs, although the linguistic properties of the material involved, such as relative frequency, morphological complexity, or word-order phenomena would not neccessarily cause one to expect this.

Yet not only children but also adults give preference to nouns in the early phases of the acquisition process, as the data from the ESF project indicate. There is additional evidence from a much broader data base compiled within the HDP project mentioned at the beginning. Analyses of a sample of 3500 utterances from conversations with 40 Italian and

Spanish migrant workers also show that in the acquisition process nominal elements appear in earlier phases than verbal ones.

However, as DIETRICH (1985, p.4) convincingly argues, GENTNER's "Natural Partitions Hypothesis" cannot serve to explain this fact, because adults, unlike children, already have a fully developed system of perceptual and cognitive patterns for structuring and conceptualizing the input from their visual and linguistic environment. Since there is no longer the problem of structuring the perceptual world into cognitive categories, nor need for basic concept-formation, one would expect the growth of the target language lexicon to be determined by other factors, such as the communicative or pragmatic needs of the learner, the linguistic structure of the target language, the specific linguistic status and function of its lexical categories and the features of the learner's first language. It is precisely within these linguistic rather than cognitive parameters that I want to discuss the grammatical status, specific use and low frequency of adjectives as evident in the data compiled within the ESF project in Germany. I shall focus on selected material from the early language of Tino and Marcelli, two Italian learners, and Ayse, a Turkish learner.

3 Predication in the learner's language

3.1 Adjectives and related word classes

In view of the fundamental dichotomy between object reference and predication, and its implications for the frequency of the corresponding lexical categories in the learner's early lexicon, the rare use of adjectives comes as a surprise, especially when compared with the relative frequency of verbs. In spite of the fact that adjectives lend themselves to

predication, the informants tended to give priority to elements from other word classes, even in an experiment specifically designed to elicit adjectives. When asked to characterize people pictured in a handbook of behavioural psychology according to their emotional states and dispositions, Tino, for instance, uses the words and expressions shown in table **D** (see appendix). Not only does he repeatedly switch to verbal or nominal predicates, including formulaic expressions like "prima Mann" or "gutes Kind", but he also seems to overgeneralize the meaning of adjectives like "böse", "dumm" or "gut" to account for a wide range of behavioural and emotional characteristics.

It is also to be noticed that words such as "prima", "gut", "böse", "dumm", "idiot" are normally used by native speakers for subjective assessment or even for derogatory purposes rather than for objective description. It is probably this widespread everyday use of qualifying terms on which Tino draws and which shapes his repertoire of qualifying terms at this early stage. This is further underlined by the fact that Tino could not give an antonym of "dumm" and "blöd" although he commented on them as words he would hear "a thousand times every day". Independent from the rather unfavourable light this statement sheds on the communicational practice in Tino's host country, it shows that the semantic structure of the learner's lexicon is not only defined within the parameters of lexical semantics but equally within pragmatics, particularly as far as the derogatory use of certain adjectives and their resulting semantic scope are concerned.

3.2 Antithetical structures

A closer look at the internal structure of the adjectival repertoire of

the 3 learners under consideration reveals a clear tendency towards an antithetical organisation of qualifying concepts. Table E (see appendix) presents pairs of adjectives and adverbs occurring during a series of picture descriptions in which 3 pictures of a city and its changes over 3 decades had to be compared. As can be seen, most adjectives are used with their lexical antonyms or complementaries; however, in some cases the overgeneralized use of certain adjectives prevents us from specifying definite lexical items as their clearly definable opposites. This is especially true for evaluating adjectives such as "schön", which is used by Ayse in such an unspecific way that it allows for antithetical expressions as different as "kaputt", "alt", "schlecht" and "schmutzig". Likewise, Tino appears to consider "richtig" as a possible antonym of "böse", while on the other hand putting "verrückt", "wenig seriös" and "dumm" on a par and using them interchangeably.

These overgeneralizations and idiosyncratic usages of certain qualifying adjectives suggest that early learners are particularly uncertain about the semantic scope and pragmatic appropriateness of such words. In a sense these findings can be seen as an extreme expression of the alleged vagueness of so-called polar or relative adjectives, whose meaning can often be specified only after close consideration of the specific context in which they appear and of their possible antonyms in this context. One may, for example, think of a number of quite different antitheses of an evaluating statement like "Er ist blöd". Such antitheses could for example be: "Er ist klug", "er ist schlau", "er ist in Ordnung", "er ist nett", etc. Thus, consideration of the antithetical structure of the semantics of many adjectives can play an important role in their successful monosemic use in discourse.

However, there is no indication in the data examined so far that adult learners acquire the unmarked member of a pair of antonymous adjectives

first, as has been shown by CLARK (1973) to be the case in early child language. A hypothesis put forward by CLARK (1969, p.389) could serve as an explanation for the preferred acquisition of unmarked adjectives by children:

> "According to the principle of lexical marking, the senses of certain 'positive' adjectives, like good and long are stored in memory in a less complex form than the senses of their opposites".

As in the case of GENTNER's "Natural Partition Hypothesis" discussed earlier, one must be careful not to automatically transfer the findings, hypotheses and principles from first language development to the second language acquisition of adults. While the first may to a large extent be determined by psychological factors intrinsic to the child's developing cognitive capacities, the latter is dominated by the communicative needs and pragmatic strategies of the adult learner as well as the linguistic properties of his first and second language.

3.3 Grading and comparison

The semantic polarity and relativity of many - if not most - adjectives have been taken as a structural prerequisite for one of their most typical features, namely their gradability. A closer examination of the linguistic means employed by the three informants under consideration shows that they use both morphological and lexical means to specify or compare objects, states or actions with respect to certain qualities. However, the learners show a clear tendency towards an analytical approach to grading and comparison, in which lexical items such as "nicht", "nicht so", "mittel", "bißchen", "mehr", "viel", "ganz" are combined with adjectives in

an attempt to specify the degree to which an object displays a certain property.

An experiment in which 3 pictures of one and the same city and its development over 3 decades had to be compared aimed at the elicitation of descriptive and referential rather than action-orientated narrative lexical material. Although nouns and verbs outnumber adjectives by far, it is interesting to look at the way in which the informants attempt to narrow down the semantic space between pairs of antithetic adjectival expressions. A house under construction is "nicht fertig, aber ungefähr", other objects are described as "nicht so kleine" and "nicht so neue". "Nicht" also plays a central part in rather complex formulations like "nicht blau, nicht grün, es ist mittel" and "nicht heller, nicht dúnkler, dann mittel". Likewise, in a film re-telling, Ayse first comments on a negro woman as "sie ist schwarz - nicht so schwarz" while in a second re-telling using "schwarz bißchen".

It has been stated by DITTMAR (1984) that the negation of adjectives as a substitute for their lexical antonyms "must be regarded as an important element of language learners' strategies and semantics" (p.263). However, in the cases mentioned before, the negation of the adjective does not serve to form an antonym; its function is rather to fill the semantic space between two polar adjectives and to establish an intermediate meaning between their two semantic poles. Nevertheless, there are occurrences of "nicht" together with evaluating adjectives like "schön" and "gut", to which DITTMAR's comment appears to apply. The negated use of these adjectives seems to fulfil two different functions: while the negation of "schön" compensates for the lack of knowledge of its exact lexical antonym, the informants' use of "nicht gut" as an alternative to "schlecht" - which is known to them - expresses their reluctance to commit themselves to a clear-cut antonym of "gut".

As far as the formation of the comparative and superlative of adjectives is concerned, the general tendency towards an analytical, i.e. lexical, approach to grading and comparison is obvious. Although Ayse sometimes builds comparatives morphologically by using the appropriate ending, both she and Tino systematically employ the particles "mehr" and "viel" to form the comparative and superlative. Furthermore, the reiteration of "viel", "sehr" and "ganz" serves as an additional intensifier and again appears to replace alternative lexical items normally used in German. Finally, the occurrence of redundant comparative expressions such as "mehr größer" and "mehr dunkler" further underlines the dominance of the decompositional approach to grading even in those instances where the correct morphological alternative is known to the learner.

In the remaining part of this paper I shall try to relate the empirical findings from the ESF project presented so far to some pertinent theories on the grammatical, logical and communicative role and function of adjectives. I shall particularly concentrate on those aspects of adjectives which may serve as an explanation of their low frequency and idiosyncratic use during the early phases of the acquisition process.

4. Some remarks on the status of adjectives in language and communication

4.1 Adjectives in Generative Semantics

GIVON (1970) raises the question whether the status of adjectives in the lexicon is that of 'semantic primitives' (p.816). His answer to this question, which aims at a clarification of the role and function of adjectives at the level of a emantic deep structure, turns out to be

negative:

> "... we are dealing with a lexical category whose universality is open to doubt, and whose membership arises primarily through overt derivation even in those languages where it does exist. It is therefore perhaps no accident that even the relatively few underived adjectives of English are semantically based on nouns or verbs." (p.837)

Thus the meaning of adjectives can only be explained through paraphrases which necessarily contain nouns or verbs. GIVON considers the way in which lexical meanings are explained in dictionaries as empirical evidence supporting his claims:

> "However, while the CORE of noun or verb definitions contains a noun or verb, respectively, the core of an adjectival definition does not involve an adjective, but rather - for the NOUN-BASED adjectives discussed thus far - a noun of QUALITY." (p.820)

It follows from this argument that within the framework of Generative Semantics the lexical and grammatical category 'adjective' cannot be defined in semantic terms but only syntactically or morphologically. Adjectives are precluded from the level of semantic deep structure at which the prelexical transformations postulated by Generative Semanticists take place. Languages whose lexicon does not contain the word class 'adjective' serve as additional empirical evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Arguing in a similar way to GIVON, ROSS/LAKOFF (1967) arrive at the conclusion that "...what traditional grammarians called adjectives and verbs are really members of the same major grammatical category" (p.15). However, it remains unclear what exactly is meant by the "major grammatical category" to which the authors allude, since syntactical and

morphological criteria seem to be disregarded in favour of the sole criterion of Generative Semantics, i.e. deep structure semantics. One may argue that the Generative Semanticists' one-sided view of grammatical word classes as semantic primitives does not do justice to the traditional surface-structural definition of lexical categories in terms of their syntactical, morphological and general semantic features. Nevertheless, in spite of the possible scepticism towards some of their speculations concerning the allegedly "empirical" status of adjectives, it can be stated that Generative Semanticists interpret adjectives as derivatives of nouns or verbs, therefore considering them as a secondary category within the semantic process of concept formation.

4.2 The logical status of property expressions

Logical arguments presented by language philosophers also seem to support the notion of adjectives as a secondary grammatical category whose meaningful application is dependent on the prior use of referential terms. The much discussed realist viewpoint, according to which the use of adjectives in some way or other implies the existence of universals, has been shown to be a fallacy caused by a logical misinterpretation of the semantics and use of ordinary language. In his attempt to shed some light on FREGE's statement that the meaning of a grammatical predicate is a concept, SEARLE (1971) arrives at the following interpretation of FREGE's often mistaken formulation:

> "Der Ausdruck 'bedeutet einen Begriff' bedeutet also 'schreibt einen Begriff zu'. Einen Begriff bedeuten oder auf einen Begriff verweisen heißt einfach, eine Eigenschaft zuschreiben." (p.154)

Thus, ontological speculations are reduced to statements about the grammar of ordinary language:

> "Gegenstand ist für Frege alles, worauf mit einem singulären Nominalausdruck hingewiesen werden kann [.....]. Einen Begriff bedeuten heißt dagegen: mittels des Gebrauchs eines grammatischen Prädikats eine Eigenschaft zuzuschreiben." (p.155)

Since properties cannot be referred to but only be predicated of referential terms, and since predication is therefore a purely language-internal phenomenon, properties 'exist' in language only, rather than in the domain of real objects.

Another linguistically minded logician, SCHMIDT (1966), also takes predication as "...den Sachverhalt, daß einem Gegenstand eine Eigenschaft zugeschrieben wird, sowie denjenigen, daß zwischen Gegenständen eine Beziehung ausgesagt wird." (p.28.). Since predicating first of all presupposes a reference object to which the property in question is being ascribed, according to SCHMIDT one has to assume a logical, ontological and linguistic priority of referential expressions over predications (SCHMIDT 1970, p.26). With regard to the language acquisition of adult learners, this conclusion appears to reflect the fact that nominal, i.e. referential, terms are acquired before predicative elements.

Whether the logical reasoning sketched here really is to be taken as an explanation of this phenomenon remains to be decided. However, any discussion of the low frequency of adjectival predications as compared to the general preponderance of nominal, referential expressions in the early phases of second language acquisition must include a consideration of the specific pragmatic function and semantic status of adjectives in communication. It is this aspect of property predications and their role in

second language acquisition to which I shall finally turn.

4.3 The pragmatics and semantics of adjectives

As the German technical term 'Eigenschaftswort' and the philosophical arguments presented above suggest, the primary function of adjectives is to qualify objects of reference with regard to certain features and dimensions. The term 'dimensions' indicates that the use of most adjectives allows for a range of qualifications varying both in quality and in degree. With the exception of so-called 'absolute' adjectives, such as "dead" or "married", most adjectives, particularly the polar ones, open a wide semantic spectrum of property ascriptions, within which the speaker locates his predication. The degree of precision depends largely on the communicative needs of a speaker in a given situation, which may call for the use of rather finely tuned intensifiers and so called 'hedges' for the speaker to express the finer nuances possible within predication. It is exactly this semantic and pragmatic flexibility, as it were, which predestines adjectives for their use in very subjective and - at least implicitly - evaluating judgements and qualifications. Adjectives therefore lend themselves to employment in speech acts which, although seemingly factual and objective, can go far beyond the illocutionary role of a neutral predication.

In addition to the pragmatic complexity and large semantic potential of many adjectives, their adequate use also requires the speaker to have a sound knowledge of the lexical-semantic structures and syntagmatic relations associated with adjectives. Owing to their restricted command of the target language, early learners are likely either to form semantically deviant syllogisms, such as "tight street" and "narrow

trousers", or to overgeneralize the meaning of certain adjectives, as is the case with "gut", "dumm", "blöd", etc. in the data discussed in the present paper. The unspecific meaning and the context-dependency of an adjective like "gut", which have led KATZ (1964) to take it as syncategorematic, make it likely that the early learner will use it in a wide range of expressions and speech acts such as promising, recommending, describing, persuading, etc., whilst at the same time avoiding the rather complex linguistic rules and structures associated with the application of more specific adjectives.

In summary, it can be stated that the command of adjectives requires a particularly high degree of linguistic competence on the part of the learner. As "charakterisierende Beiwörter" (ERBEN 1976, p.100), adjectives are neither suitable for reference to objects, persons, time and place, nor can they normally be used to verbalize actions. In view of the importance and dominant role of these domains in everyday communication it is therefore not surprising that the lexical means pertinent to these linguistic domains are acquired prior to qualifying expressions in the early stages of second language acquisition.

References

Clark, H.H. (1969): Linguistic Processes in Deductive Reasoning. In: Psychological Review, 387-404

Clark, E.V. (1973): What's in a word? On the child's acquisition of semantics in his first language. In: Moore, T.E (ed.): Cognitive Development and the Acquisition of Language. NewYork.

Dietrich, R. (1985): Nound and Verbs in the Learner's Lexicon. Unpublished manuscript. Heidelberg University.

Dittmar, N. (1984): Semantic Features of Pidginized Learner Varieties of German. In: Andersen, R. (ed.): Second Languages. A Cross-Linguistic Perspective. Rowley, Mass.

Erben, J. (1976): Deutsche Grammatik. Ein Leitfaden. Frankfurt/M.

Gentner, D. (1982): Why Nouns are Learned Before Verbs: Linguistic Relativity versus Natural Partitioning. In: Kuizaj, S. (ed.): Language Development: Language, Cognition and Culture. Hillsdale, N.J.

Givon, T. (1970): Notes on the Semantic Structure of English Adjectives. In: Language 46, 816-837.

Katz, J.J. (1964): Semantic Theory and the Meaning of *Good*. In: The Journal of Philosophy 61, 739-766.

Perdue, C. (1984) (ed.): Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants. A Field Manual. Strasbourg.

Ross, J.R./Lakoff,G. (1967): Stative Adjectives and Verbs. Harvard.

Schmidt, F. (1966): Zeichen und Wirklichkeit. Linguistisch-semantische Untersuchungen. München.

Schmidt, F. (1970): Symbolische Syntax. München.

Searle, J.R. (1971): Sprechakte. Ein sprachphilosophischer Essay. Frankfurt/M.

Abstract

Some findings concerning the distribution and specific use of adjectives in the naturally acquired German of one Turkish and two Italian immigrants are presented. The data were collected over 2.5 years within the European Science Foundation project "Second Language Acquisition of Adult Immigrants", conducted in 5 European countries. A survey on the occurrence of the major word classes in the learners' language reveals a clear preponderence of nouns and verbs over adjectives, with nouns acquired before verbs. That reference terms are acquired before predicative elements has already been discussed by D. Gentner (child language) and R. Dietrich (adult language acquisition). The theoretical frame to describe the (rare) use of adjectives in the data is based on Dietrich's concept of the communicative, pragmatic function of lexical items as opposed to Gentner's emphasis on perceptual, cognitive parameters. Special attention is paid to the relationship between adjectives and related word classes. Typical features of the learners' adjectival lexicon, such as its antithetical structures (antonyms/complementaries) and the expression of grading and comparison are examined. Finally, relevant suggestions concerning the status of adjectives and property expressions made within Generative Semantics, logical theory and pragmatics are presented in order to account for the tendency amongst learners to use verbal elements in place of predicative adjectives.